

Administrator's Equal Employment Opportunity/Civil Rights Awards Nomination Form

AWARD CATEGORY (please mark "X" in appropriate box) ☐ Supervisory/Managerial ☐ Non-Supervisory/Non-Managerial

NOMINEE (please mark "X" in appropriate box) ☐ Individual ☐ Group

Please include the following information for each individual nomination and for each member of a group nomination. A list may be attached for group nominations. Display the exact name to be shown on the award.

NAME OF NOMINEE OR GROUP

TITLE

Mid-South Area Workforce Diversity Committee

(see attached)

AREA/BRANCH/LOCATION

Mid-South Area, Stoneville, MS (JWDSRC, 141 Experiment Station Road, Stoneville, MS 38776)

TELEPHONE (include area code)

FAX

E-MAIL

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CITATION (not more than 25 words)

FOR ESTABLISHING WORKFORCE DIVERSITY IN AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE AND FOSTERING AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE ALL EMPLOYEES CONTRIBUTE CREATIVE IDEAS, SEEK CHALLENGES, ASSUME LEADERSHIP AND EXCEED AT BOTH BUSINESS AND PERSONAL OBJECTIVES.

JUSTIFICATION (State the selection criteria for Category I and/or II. Document the facts relevant to the selection.) DO NOT ATTACH MORE THAN ONE ADDITIONAL SHEET.

The diversity of the American population has been its greatest asset and probably its most underutilized asset. With rapidly changing U.S. demographics and the globalization of trade within the last decade, it has been well recognized that those organizations astute enough to embrace diversity in their workforce, at all levels, will improve employee morale and productivity, and generate innovation through a wider range of solutions. Realizing the urgent need to diversify the workforce in USDA/ARS, the Mid South Area (MSA) Director, Dr. Edgar King, established a MSA Workforce Diversity Committee (MSAWDC) in 1998 to develop the MSA workforce to reflect the changing face of America. Dr. King put together a team of MSA employees to serve on the committee based on: (1) the employees strong commitment to this issue (because the task was uphill and challenging); (2) their ability to take on this added responsibility (because these were not full-time positions); and (3) representation from each location within MSA, grade-levels, and ethnic backgrounds (because many different view-points needed to be represented). The mandate of Dr. King to the committee was simple: "Diversification of the MSA workforce is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do!" The committee followed the principle that development of the most innovative, productive and efficient workforce required incorporation of a philosophy among its fellow employees of fostering a culture that is built on trust, respect, teamwork, communication, empowerment and commitment, in an environment free of discrimination. The committee, in the short period of three years, has made remarkable strides in achieving its goals by establishing three parallel paths of action, namely effective recruitment and outreach programs, retention through training and development, and a spirit of inclusion and assimilation to achieve and accept diversity in the MSA workplace.

Recruitment. This aspect of the committees task has included vigorous and targeted recruitment for current vacancies as well as building a diverse pool of potential candidates for future employment. The committee has developed specific literature (posters, handouts etc., following significant research) for distribution and a web-site to highlight employment opportunities in agricultural sciences, as well as in administration in MSA/ARS. This literature has been freely shared with other ARS locations. **(1) For filling immediate vacancies,** Committee members have identified a select but effective list of sources for

NOMINATOR NAME (printed)

NOMINATOR TITLE

AREA/BRANCH/LOCATION

SIGNATURE OF NOMINATOR

DATE

TELEPHONE (include area code)

FAX

E-MAIL

NAME OF AREA DIRECTOR (if not the nominator) - (printed)

SIGNATURE OF AREA DIRECTOR

underrepresented minorities. To monitor accountability in hiring, the Area Administration has required every MSA selecting official to provide written evidence that he/she has made all reasonable efforts to assure that the Certificate of Eligibles issued to fill vacancies includes individuals from targeted/under-represented groups. In addition new employees are surveyed to identify the most effective recruitment opportunities. This aggressive approach has also been adopted by the ARS Director for Recruitment to fill vacancies at all ARS locations. The approach of MSAWDC and the strong commitment of the Area Administration has already resulted in notable changes in the MSA workforce. For example, between 2000-2001 there was only a 4% increase in the white male/female employment, but a 8% increase in African-American females, a 10% increase in Asian females and a 20% rise in the Hispanic female employee category. Although three Native-American employees left the MSA workforce, 3 were added in 2001, demonstrating the establishment of a conduit for a diverse group of employees. More importantly, this change in diversity index was reflected at the higher grade levels (at GS-11 and above): e.g. a Native American female was competitively recruited at the Senior Executive Service level (Associate Area Director), several African-American females were hired at the scientist levels (GS-11 and higher), and Hispanics were promoted from within (on a competitive basis) to the scientist level from support staff level (GS-9), as well as to managerial levels. We have actively recruited at Alabama A&M Univ., and several scientists have been hired including one very recently at the MSA Poplarville, MS location. Consequently, MSA leads ARS in minority and women employment at every grade level. **(2) In building a future pool of employees**, the MSA Administration took the lead in directing each MSA Research Leader to establish one or more student position within his/her unit as part of a targeted diversification program. Specific promotional material (bilingual) was prepared by committee members to highlight to students at both high school and undergraduate levels that ARS/MSA is the most rewarding place to work in agriculture related disciplines, where specific programs for diversity are sought and celebrated - not avoided. Involvement with minority teachers (0 in '98, 2 in '99, and 11 in '00) in agriculture related sciences, with student and community activities such as participation in science fairs, career fairs, career counseling, mentoring students, recognizing scholarly achievement that advance an appreciation for agriculture and agricultural research have been used as recruitment tools. These activities have been recognized through a number of liaisons and Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with historically African-American 1890 Universities. Federal grants have been received to provide financial support for minority student employment programs (e.g. \$100,000 with University of New Orleans and Southern University of New Orleans; \$50,000 with Xavier University of New Orleans). Under a MOU, ARS Administration has selected the MSAWDC to take the lead on training a diverse pool of students and faculty from Miami Dade Community College. In the July-August 2000 edition of USDA News, MSAWDC members were recognized for working with high school students to develop skills for the workplace. Alabama A&M University (an 1890 Institution) declared ARS/MSA a Gold Level Sponsor in employment programs because of the expanded use of Federal Student Career Enhancement Program (one student in 1997 to 18 in 2000 from this University) to train and employ minority graduate students for non-competitive hiring at the Scientist Level.

Retention. To retain our best and brightest, the committee has utilized creative ways for professional development of our workforce through the use of the Individual Development Plan and effective use of monetary and non-monetary awards. Employees have been made very aware of potential for upward mobility and achievement of career goals. These programs, just in the last year have resulted in several promotions and reassignments of quality employees to desirable and suitable positions; thus enhancing employee morale and productivity. For example, a Hispanic female Secretary (GS-5) was promoted (competitively) to a GS-7 Program Analyst position, upon completing her B.S. degree. Another female technical employee was promoted (through desk audit) to GS-11, from GS-9, upon completing her M.S. degree. Two other African-American female employees were moved into Administrative (Supervisory) positions (with promotions) after completing one year details at various MSA locations.

Assimilation. To successfully utilize and assimilate a diverse workforce, some common sense practices must also receive regular and deliberate attention; with actions such as welcoming, valuing and respecting. The MSAWDC has promoted the establishment of Human Relations Committees at all MSA locations to celebrate special observance events such as Hispanic, Asian-Pacific, Native American, and African American Heritage Months. This program has been very effective in employees accepting their differences and recognizing their similarities. For example, at the New Orleans and Stoneville locations the special observances are celebrated with a cultural awareness program, often coupled with an ethnic meal, to help employees understand and appreciate cultural differences. In addition, at an annual Cultural Diversity Day, ALL diversity is celebrated. For this innovative approach to assimilation of a diverse workforce, MSA locations have received various regional and national EEO awards.

In spite of these demonstrated successes, the MSAWDC realizes that establishing diversity in the workforce is a PROCESS and not a PROJECT. For a permanent open mindedness to alternate points of view, the committee is constantly finding innovative ways to change the culture within the MSA workforce by learning from others, such as the Office of Personnel Management and some major U.S. Corporations. Although serving on the WDC has significantly increased the workload of its members nominated for this award, all have used creative thinking and shown exceptional dedication to the task, spending many hours of their personal time, money and efforts to make sure that they are doing the right thing.